13 March 2020

NOVEL CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19): NRF RESPONSE UPDATE

Following the World Health Organization (WHO) declaration of COVID-19 as a global pandemic, as well as ongoing reports on global endeavours aimed at managing this virus (e.g. the banning of travel from most of Europe to the United States; the lockdown in Italy, and various localised lockdowns), it is evident that the pandemic will remain with us for some time until a worldwide solution is found. Be that as it may, we continue to urge staff to remain calm.

Various measures are currently being undertaken by institutions and businesses with a view to minimising exposure to and managing the effects and impact of the virus on their employees and business operations. Having reflected on the diversified nature of our business and risk areas identified in our organisation in regard to the virus, we have considered it prudent to revise the NRF’s response by augmenting the Travel Advisory measures communicated to staff on 3 March 2020, and introducing some new important ones. The measures set out below will come into effect immediately and remain in place, until further notice:

1. **Travel, Conferences and Hosting of Visitors**
   1.1. **Travel**

   1.1.1 Following a careful consideration of measures currently being put in place by institutions similar to ours, as well as advice provided through the World Health Organisation (WHO), **all business-related international air travel (incl. those scheduled but not undertaken) is hereby suspended with immediate effect.** Updates will be provided on a weekly basis depending on availability of new information about the virus.

   1.1.2 Whilst business-related domestic travel is not at this stage embargoed, employees are urged to seriously reconsider the necessity of undertaking such travel, given the risk of CORVID-19 spread at airports. Where feasible, employees are urged to prioritise the use of video-conferencing.

   1.1.3 Any exemption from this travel embargo will be dealt with by the relevant NRF Executives on a case by case basis, regard being given to, among other things,:
• The extent of the urgency and the associated risks to the individual and co-workers upon their return;
• Organisational strategic or operational importance for travel;
• Additional criteria such as age and fitness of the employee requesting to travel;
• The prevalence of the virus at the destination; and
• The risk and costs of disrupted itineraries.

1.1.4 Where cancellations are considered, affected employees should discuss all of these with their Business Unit executives and/or their travel administrators with a view to minimising financial losses or the incurring of fruitless expenditure. The logical consequence of air travel cancellations should follow (car hire, shuttle, accommodation, event organisers, business partners etc.).

1.1.5 In support of the embargo and in light of the rapidly changing travel advice being issued, the NRF’s travel insurer, Chubb, have removed the ability to self-issue insurance certificates. Applications will be sent to Chubb directly to be reviewed against current travel advice to the destination and provide a Proof of Insurance document if there is no advisory notice against travel. This action ensures that there is no misunderstanding as to whether coverage will be in place or not for any planned travel.

1.1.6 All staff intending to undertake any personal international trips should inform their Business Unit heads or Line Managers before undertaking these.

1.1.7 All currently travelling employees (and those exempted from the travel embargo) who are returning from international trips, whether private travel while on leave or non-NRF funded travel, are required not to come to work but work from home for a period of up to 14 days. During this period, employees should monitor themselves for symptoms (as advised by the relevant medical authorities).

1.1.8 Should you show symptoms of the viral infection, you should contact your medical service provider immediately. Please phone such medical service providers ahead to describe your symptoms, and places of travel, so that they can take appropriate pre-cautionary measures.

1.2. Conferences and Hosting of Visitors

1.2.1. Conferences and large gatherings (>20 people) are major hubs for the spreading of COVID-19, and attendance should not be allowed unless
otherwise approved by your respective Business Unit head, who should give particular scrutiny to the risks involved. Where possible, video links should be used instead of physical attendance.

1.2.2. Managers should discuss with domestic and international visitors the urgency and/or necessity of their visit and discourage all but essential engagements. Video-conferencing facilities should be the medium of choice and utilised as much as possible.

1.2.3. All workplace precautionary measures regarding regular handwashing and good respiratory hygiene should be communicated by hosts of any visitors in a courteous manner. Information leaflets regarding this shall be made available as soon as possible.

2. **Workplace Precautionary Measures**

2.1. Regular Handwashing – Employees should wash their hands regularly with soap and water (or disinfect with hand sanitiser) not only after the use of ablution facilities, but also in the event you suspect you have been in contact with an individual that is displaying respiratory symptoms (coughing or sneezing) or have been in contact with ‘high-touch’ surfaces (i.e. meeting room tables, door handles, kitchen counters). Employees should avoid touching their nose or mouth if regular handwashing has not been practised.

2.2. Good Respiratory Hygiene – Employees should try to cough or sneeze into tissue or towelling that should be immediately thrown away. Employees should try, wherever possible, to keep a 1m distance from individuals displaying symptoms of respiratory illness such as coughing and sneezing. This should be done in a sensitive and considerate manner to avoid unintended stigmatisation.

2.3. Increased Disinfection of Common ‘High-Touch’ Surfaces – Service providers and employees responsible for housekeeping at all Business Units should be instructed to ensure all meeting room tables, kitchen counters and regularly used door handles are wiped down with appropriate disinfectant on a daily basis.

2.4. Increased vigilance and expectations of cleanliness in the workplace, especially in communal areas, including ablution facilities, and attention to personal hygiene should be encouraged.

3. **Reporting of Suspected Illness**

3.1. Return from Travel (Private or Business-Related)
3.1.1 If you have returned from an area where COVID-19 is spreading, or suspect you have interacted with individuals that have returned from an area where COVID-19 is spreading (e.g. airports or conferences), you are expected to inform your Line Manager before returning to work. Should you test positive, you are expected to seek medical advice which could include being on sick leave. The outcome of the test should be communicated to the Business Unit heads before returning to the workplace (see Section 3.3 on testing).

3.1.2 All currently travelling employees (and those exempted from the travel embargo) who are returning from international trips, whether private travel while on leave or non-NRF funded travel, are required to inform their Line Managers and NOT to come to work but work from home for a period of up to 14 days. During this period, employees should self-isolate and monitor themselves for symptoms (as advised by the relevant medical authorities).

3.1.3 Should you show viral infection symptoms, whether during the self-monitoring period or general upon return to the country, you should contact your medical service provider immediately. Please phone such medical service providers ahead to describe your symptoms, and places of travel, so that they can take appropriate precautionary measures.

3.1.4 The outcome of the test should be communicated to your Business Unit or Line Manager (see Section 3.3 below on testing).

3.2 Illness whilst at work (regardless of travel)

3.2.1 Should you begin to show symptoms whilst at work, please immediately report this (telephonically or via email) to your Health & Safety Officer, Health & Safety Representative, HR Practitioner or HR Manager, who will advise on a further course of action.

3.3 Testing

3.3.1 COVID-19 is diagnosed by using DNA analysis to test for the COVID-19 virus. The process uses polymerase chain reaction (PCR) molecular testing on a sample from the nose, throat or chest. People who develop symptoms of respiratory illness including cough, fever and shortness of breath either during or after travel to countries where coronavirus is known to be circulating must seek medical care early and share information about travel history with their healthcare providers. Some South African medical aids have communicated specific benefits that complement existing benefits and extend cover in cases
of COVID-19. These benefits provides full funding for tests and treatment in confirmed cases of COVID-19 during the period of the outbreak. If you present with symptoms and meet the criteria for testing, do the following:

- Contact your doctor who will assess your risk and guide the testing process;
- Stay at home and avoid contact with others. Follow preventive practices to prevent the possible transmission and follow your doctor’s advice about treating your symptoms while waiting for the tests results;
- Alternatively, call the **NICD helpline on 0800 029 999**. They will also advise you where the closest public or private facility is for you to go for a test and how to access the facility. The hotline operates on weekdays, Monday to Friday, from 08:00 to 16:00.

3. **Access/contact points**

   3.1. At NRF Business Units and Facilities where biometric access control is in place, service providers and employees responsible for housekeeping shall be instructed to ensure that appropriate sanitising dispensers are put in prominent places close to the biometric access points and that these dispensers are regularly refilled.

   3.2. As a minimum, posters promoting hand sanitising, housekeeping and promoting hand-washing should be displayed at various key areas of the workplace.

4. **Take your laptop home daily**

   4.1. If you have a work laptop, continue to take it home with you at the end of each day so that you can work from home, in the event of us having to shut down an office location for any period of time.

Continue accessing the following links to sources of information and updates about the virus:

- National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD)
- Department of Health (DOH)
- International SOS
- World Health Organisation (WHO)
- Centers for Disease Control (CDC)
- Visualisation of outbreak at [John Hopkins CDDE](https://www.jhucdde.com) and [Worldometer](https://www.worldometer.info)
The NRF continues to monitor all available information and developments in this regard, both from the South African health sector and in particular the Department of Health (DOH) and the National Institute of Communicable Diseases (NICD) as well as the World Health Organisation, and will provide updated information as and when relevant.

Molapo Qhobela PhD
NRF: CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

[Signature reproduced electronically on request]
Annexure: COVID-19 (Coronavirus) Fact Sheet¹

1. What is COVID-19 (Coronavirus)?

COVID-19 is a form of coronavirus, which causes respiratory infections.

2. What are the symptoms of COVID-19 (Coronavirus)?

The most common symptoms of COVID-19 are fever, tiredness, and dry cough. Some patients may have aches and pains, nasal congestion, runny nose, sore throat or diarrhoea. These symptoms are usually mild and begin gradually. Some people become infected but don’t develop any symptoms and don’t feel unwell.

Most people (about 80%) recover from the disease without needing special treatment. Around 1 out of every 6 people who gets COVID-19 becomes seriously ill and develops difficulty breathing. Older people, and those with underlying medical problems such as high blood pressure, heart problems or diabetes, are more likely to develop serious illness. The disease is fatal in approximately 2% of people infected.

The incubation period, the time taken between when you catch the virus to when you start showing symptoms, is estimated to be between 1 – 14 days, with the most common being 5 days.

3. How does COVID-19 (Coronavirus) spread?

The World Health Organisation is assessing ongoing research on the ways in which COVID-19 is spread. Studies to date suggest that the COVID-19 is mainly transmitted through contact with respiratory droplets and not through the air. In other words, the disease is spread from person to person via small droplets from the nose or mouth (i.e. when a person coughs or exhales).

Droplets may either land on a person, or on surfaces that are subsequently touched by a person. Although further research is required, it is understood that the virus may persist on surfaces from a few hours or up to several days.

4. Can COVID-19 (Coronavirus) be caught from a person with no symptoms?

¹ As informed by the World Health Organisation situational updates and reports on the COVID-19 Coronavirus.
The primary manner in which the disease is spread is through respiratory droplets, expelled by someone who is coughing. So, the risk of catching COVID-19 from someone who is not displaying any symptoms of any kind is low. However, many people with COVID-19 experience only mild symptoms. This is particularly true at the early stages of the disease. It is therefore possible to catch COVID-19 from someone who has, for example, just a mild cough and does not feel ill. WHO is assessing ongoing research on the period of transmission of COVID-19 and will continue to share updated findings.

5. How likely am I to catch COVID-19?

The risk depends on where you live or where you have travelled recently – the risk of infection is higher in areas where people have been diagnosed with COVID-19.

6. How do I protect myself and others from becoming infected?

The following measures have been identified by the World Health Organisation to be the most effective way to protect yourself and others against COVID-19. Application of these measures should be strictly adhered to if you have travelled to an area where COVID-19 is known to be spreading:

a. Regularly and thoroughly clean your hands with an alcohol-based hand rub or wash them with soap and water – this kills any virus that may be on your hands;
b. Wipe down surfaces you suspect may have been infected with a simply disinfectant
c. Maintain 1m distance from people that are coughing and sneezing – this is to avoid breathing in any droplets that may be dispersed from any infected person;
d. Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth – should there be any virus on your hands, touching these areas will enable the virus to enter the body easily;
e. Cover your cough with either the inside of your elbow, or a tissue (and throw away immediately) – this is to stop the spread of droplets onto other people and surfaces, in the event you are infected; and
f. Stay at home if you have a fever, coughing and having difficulty breathing and seek medical attention. Call the medical service provider in advance, particularly if you have travelled to an area where COVID-19 has been spreading, such that appropriate precautionary measures can be taken.

7. What precautions should I take if travelling?
Whilst in crowded areas such as airports, or in plane cabins, the regular protection measures should be strictly adhered to. Airlines are working together with the World Health Organisation to monitor risks, and have put in place standard operating procedures in the event that a passenger is suspected of having been infected with COVID-19. As the virus is not airborne, the air circulated within an airplane cabin is considered safe and will not enable the spread of the COVID-19 virus.

If you have returned from an area where COVID-19 is spreading, and begin to feel unwell, even with mild symptoms such as a headache and slight runny nose, stay at home until you recover. If you develop fever, cough and difficulty breathing, seek medical advice promptly as this may be due to a respiratory infection or other serious condition. Call in advance and tell your provider of any recent travel or contact with travellers.

8. **Is it safe to receive a package from countries where COVID-19 is spreading, particularly from China?**

   It is perfectly safe to receive packages from all countries known to have reported cases of COVID-19.

**Respiratory Hygiene Poster 1**
Protect others from getting sick

When coughing and sneezing cover mouth and nose with flexed elbow or tissue

Throw tissue into closed bin immediately after use

Clean hands with alcohol-based hand rub or soap and water after coughing or sneezing and when caring for the sick

World Health Organization